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ABSTRACT

Problems encountered by Japanese women who participated in an American women's studies seminar have been valuable to the development of a cross-cultural women's course at Mary Baldwin College in Virginia. In the summer of 1981, the school offered a special women's study course to 30 Japanese university women. The program had limited success because the students had difficulty identifying with the problems of American marriage, divorce, and sex role inequalities that were the focus of the course. However, after returning to Japan, the women wrote to their American professor relating current experiences to issues they had encountered the previous summer. Based on this experience, the women's studies course underwent several changes, adopting a more relevant cross-cultural framework. The 30 female Japanese students enrolled in the 1982 course developed their own questionnaire to elicit Japanese views on marriage, family, and career. This survey, included here with responses, was administered to 200 young Japanese in the spring of 1982. Students then tabulated the data and used it as a basis for discussion and cultural comparisons in their summer course. The evolution of this course points out the dilemmas and frustrations which may result when students from a patriarchal society are confronted with women's rights issues. As their consciousness increased, many women in this course felt torn between a loyalty to their own customs and a desire to relocate to a more open-ended society. (LP)

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WOMEN'S STUDIES AND THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT:

A REPORT ON A COURSE FOR JAPANESE WOMEN

SO 015 094

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ABSTRACT

Students from other countries taught by an American professor add the dimension of cross-cultural information exchange to a women's studies course. A women's studies course was taught to two groups of thirty Japanese women students during the summers of 1981 and 1982. After a brief account of the development of the course, some of the problems which result when students from patriarchal countries are confronted with women's studies are discussed. The information gathered from a questionnaire that the students administered in Japan regarding views of male and female Japanese students towards jobs, marriage, and family is also included.

A large number of students from other countries come to American colleges and universities each year, both during the regular academic sessions and for special summer programs. These students have a dual interest and appeal for women's studies programs and people interested in exploring alternative teaching methods. They present an opportunity for teachers in women's studies to spread knowledge of new American scholarship about women beyond our borders. Moreover, the students themselves have much to teach us about women in their own countries. Most women's studies courses are structured to allow the students and teachers to explore the material together so that the teachers learn as much from the students and the experience as the students do from the teachers. Students from other countries taught by an American professor add the dimension of cross-cultural information exchange to a women's studies course.

I have had occasion to teach a women's studies course to two groups of thirty Japanese women students, in the summers of 1981 and 1982. This paper, based on that experience, consists of three parts: first, a brief account of the development of the course; second, the information gathered from a questionnaire that the students administered in Japan regarding views of male and female Japanese students towards jobs, marriage, and family; and finally, some thoughts on the dilemmas which result when students from countries at least as, if not even more patriarchal than our own, are confronted with women's studies.

Since the course "The American Woman" was to be given in the context of a summer program on American language and civilization (designed by Mary Baldwin College for students of Doshisha Women's College, Kyoto, Japan), my initial plan was to inform the students on that topic, particularly focusing

on the women's movement and feminism in the United States, marriage and divorce, careers, masculine/feminine roles and relations, and women in the media. A ground rule for the program, agreed upon by both the Japanese and American directors, was that the students had come to the United States to learn about Americans and American ways. As few modifications as possible were to be made in English vocabulary, information conveyed, or teaching methods. Thus, I set out to teach the course, using essentially the same techniques and content that I have for the past eight years at Mary Baldwin College and the University of Wisconsin in Madison. I immediately found that, while the students listened attentively and politely, the classes seemed to be having no effect beyond the mere imparting of information. Quite naturally, in an attempt to encourage the students to relate themselves and their own lives to the material, I began to ask questions about the Japanese situation with respect to the various issues. In so doing I was of course moving to a comparative approach. During that first summer, response even to the revised approach was slow. Although the students possessed a great deal of intuitive knowledge about the status of women in Japan, they had few facts, figures, or concrete illustrations to explain their intuitions. They had not thought of themselves and of their society in the same terms as those in which I was presenting the American woman. I clearly was not aware enough of the Japanese perspective on these issues to easily aid them in the transitions. To be sure, there were times when mental clicks were visible on their faces, but basically I was not sure I had reached them with anything beyond what must have appeared to be rather exotic information.

The rewards were to come later. During the following academic year, I began to receive thoughtful and troubled letters from my students. The overwhelming message was, "I couldn't believe that what you were saying had

anything to do with us. But now that we have returned to our country we see. . . ." Accounts of job discrimination, with analyses of apparently small but far-reaching customs which led to it, would follow. The following quotations from their letters provide examples. Chikako writes:

> By the way, I haven't found a job yet although I'll graduate in next March. I visited banks and asked whether women can work for a long time. They said they can but it is very difficult because of the working hour. (They implied that it is impossible.) I failed in getting job though I visited five companies. I'm worrying about my future now.

Kimiko says:

> After I came to Japan, I had a chance to talk with my friend about the situation of the American women, and I reported the knowledge given in your class. And we discussed the problems of women's going into society. As I could not perfectly listen to your lectures, because of lack of my hearing ability, I could not enough represent them. But my friend seemed to understand the outline of the difference and similarity of the situation between American women and Japanese women.
>
> We could find the same point of them that both of them have legally equal rights for men and women, and have made progress in recent years, while there are still many difficulties have been remaining. The different point is that Japan was once a matriarchal society. In the Heian Period (A.D. 8-12) when The Story of Genzi was written by Murasaki Khikibu, the marriage was the type of the "Shoseikon;" that the bridegroom is taken in marriage and only the daughter had heirship. There are specially written books on this (for instance Itsue Takamura, 1894--1964, The Study of Shoseikon-- I am sorry I don't know whether this book was translated into English).
>
> To support this they point out that today Japanese women control the household finances. I think most of Japanese wives expect their husband carry the salary untouched.

In a later letter, Chikako includes further details:

> Today I want to write you about the job for Japanese women because there was a lecture in my college for us to preparate for getting a job. I'll have to get a job during this year. I was shocked that the lecturer said many companies don't want women working many years. He said it isn't possible for women to work all her life in most of the companies because there aren't enough system for the childbirth or to work and do the housekeeping at the same time. Of course there are some companies in which women can work as well as men, and other companies tend to change into such way. But it is said that Japan is still a very conservative country.

Then he said that it is very difficult for women to be directors. In his company there are twenty female directors, while the male directors are one hundred. But people say that there are many female directors in his company. And the female directors have to give up many things instead of being directors. As an example he said that his chief is female and she has to give up doing her housekeeping. Her children are in her mother's house and she can meet them only on Sundays.

This is because of Japanese workers' habit. Many Japanese workers usually go to drink with their colleagues after their job. This habit makes them feel they are the partners and sometimes they talk about the problems of their jobs and find a solution or make a decision. So it is important for them and also for their job. But it is difficult for women who have their family to go to drink after their jobs and that makes women be apart from men and they can't be directors. I know it isn't the only reason but I think it's a big reason.

It is said that for the Americans job is only job but for the Japanese job is all, job is life. I don't know if it is true or not but I think these two nations are very different from each other.

As I wrote before I'll have to get a job in October or November, so I have to make decision what should I be. I wanted to be an English teacher but these days there are only few adoption of teacher from our college graduates. So I'm now thinking about my job. If I make a decision and something happens, I'll write you.

Clearly the comparative approach was effective. In correspondence with the Japanese institution during the 1981-82 school year, I made an attempt to build the approach more completely into the course by encouraging the students who were to come the following year to give thought in advance to the matter of women in Japan. On their own initiative, they hit upon a plan of action. They devised a survey which they administered to a group of 100 students, all women, at their own college and to a group of 100 male students at neighboring Doshisha University, which is a coeducational institution. Both the questions they asked and the answers they received provided insight into attitudes among a young Japanese middle class concerning women's issues and the status of women.

The questions presented below and the answers, including percentage calculations, are as the students presented them to me. I have made no attempt to add clarifying comments or correct minor arithmetic mistakes except in the two questions in which I added parenthetical remarks to explain a term.

1. Would you like to get a job after graduation?

	Women	Men
Yes	86.4%	97.5%
No	10.7%	2.5%
No answer	2.9%	0.0%

2. Why do you choose the job?

	Women	Men
Related to one's major	12%	18%
Large income	3%	2%
Its importance in society	0%	3%
Its stability	24%	19%
Fit for one's ability and disposition	18%	19%
Interesting	14%	16%
Many holiday to be expected	0%	7%
Equality in salary between men and women	4%	0%
Significance to be found in doing the job	12%	3%
Possibility of doing the job after marriage	4%	0%
Liking for the job	16%	12%
Miscellaneous	5%	7%
No answer	13%	13%

3. On what criteria will you choose your company or firm?

	Women	Men
Contents of business	30%	36%
Fit for one's ability and disposition	17.5%	0%
Income	11%	16.5%
Possibility of the development of the company	9%	17%
Hours for commuting	9%	3%
Stability	8%	8.5%

	Women	Men
Holiday	8%	8.5%
Its at-home atmosphere	8%	3%
Business achievement	4%	4%
Policy	4%	1%
Size of the company	4%	17%
Reputation	3%	8%
Its welfare	1%	3%
Miscellaneous	4%	7%
No answer	22%	8%

4. What kind of job do you want?

	Women	Men
Financial, business	4.9%	6.3%
Education	22.3%	7.5%
Service industry	8.7%	16.3%
Manufacturing industry	3.9%	23.8%
Official business	15.5%	18.8%
Others	25.2%	20.2%
No answer	19.5%	7.1%

5. Will you continue your job for life?

	Women	Men
Yes	38.8%	66.3%
No	16.5%	27.5%
When I marry, I will stop.	13.6%	---
When I have a baby, I quit.	19.4%	---
No answer	11.7%	6.2%

6. What is the meaning of getting a job to you?

	Women	Men
Chance of experiences	30%	0%
Social significance of one's job	17%	12%
Solid ground for being independent	16%	10%
Participation in society	13%	0%
Income	11%	45%
The turning point of life	2%	9%
Solid ground for life	10%	5%
Solid ground for supporting family	0%	8%
Restraints on one's freedom	0%	5%
Financial stability	0%	10%
Social position	0%	2%
Miscellaneous	9%	8%
No answer	11%	8%

7. Do you think it difficult to succeed for woman in her job?

	Women	Men
Yes	68.0%	61.3%
No	32.0%	36.2%
No answer	0%	3.5%

8. Do you think that women can work as well as men, when they work in high position?

	Women	Men
Yes	62.1%	47.5%
No	30.1%	48.8%
No answer	7.8%	3.7%

9. Do you want to get married?

	Women	Men
Yes	80.4%	80.0%
No	5.8%	13.8%
No answer	5.8%	6.2%

10. What are your conditions of marriage?

	Women	Men
Character	32.0%	22.5%
Love	64.1%	51.3%
Income	59.2%	22.5%
Affinity	4.9%	8.8%
Appearance	0%	8.8%
Social status of each other's family	1.0%	3.8%
Health	1.9%	1.3%
Miscellaneous	14.6%	18.8%
No answer	1.9%	6.6%

11. Which type of marriage do you prefer: arranged marriage or love marriage?

	Women	Men
Arranged	6.6%	3.8%
Love marriage	42.8%	55.0%
Either will do	45.7%	37.4%
No answer	4.9%	3.8%

12. What's the meaning of marriage to you?

	Women	Men
Living as a social unit, independent of one's parents	6.8%	3.8%
Mental support	9.7%	7.5%
Place where one feels at ease	21.4%	22.5%

	Women	Men
The turning point of one's life	10.7%	7.5%
Necessary for one's life	4.9%	12.5%
Restraint on freedom	0%	7.5%
Social stability as a social unit	11.7%	8.8%
Descendants to be expected	7.8%	10.0%
Getting a life-time partner	9.7%	15.0%
Happiness	2.6%	5.0%
Miscellaneous	6.8%	0%
No answer	12.6%	10.0%

13. What would you do with your children when you think of divorce?

	Women	Men
I'll never divorce absolutely	16.5%	31.3%
I escape divorce with my best effort	19.4%	3.8%
It does not matter whether I have my children or not	4.9%	7.5%
I'll endure until children grow up	3.9%	5.0%
I divorce because parents' trouble bad effect on the children	6.8%	2.5%
First I think about my children	29.1%	36.4%
Miscellaneous	10.7%	3.8%
No answer	11.7%	13.8%

14. What do you think about parenting? (Note: parenting means child custody)

	Women	Men
Bad effects on the mind of children	23.3%	7.5%
Good idea	11.7%	21.3%
Good. If children are adolescents	12.6%	5.0%
Objection	36.9%	1.0%

	Women	Men
Miscellaneous	13.6%	53.9%
No answer	1.9%	11.3%

The experience of these two summers spent with young Japanese women has sensitized me to the rewards, pitfalls, and dilemmas of teaching women's studies to students from such a patriarchal country as Japan. While, like any teacher, I have been gratified to see the students' growing awareness of their status as women, at the same time I have experienced anguish upon seeing that awareness become painful to them. A few have stated their desire to settle in what they see as the more open-ended American society. Others have reaffirmed to themselves and to me their commitment, in spite of reservations, to their own country and its customs. As their teacher, I have not been able to avoid thinking, with both pride and misgiving, about their futures as women of the Japanese middle class, especially at a time when the possible resurgence of militarism in their country hardly seems to promise a more egalitarian society.

However, I realize also that their response to the course is in fact very similar to the response that students in Wisconsin and Virginia have given to the course. Many feel overwhelmed, angry, and defeated when they understand the terribly inferior status of women in this country and the forces being used to keep us there. Perhaps I had become deadened and begun to forget women's true status here. This comparative experience with women from another culture made me and I hope them, aware once again of how all women must unite in a world-wide struggle to stay aware of and overcome oppression.